

(My BFF) Laurel Schmadel

This is what Laurel says about her first yoga class: “I was ready to go back... even though I was a little scared.” She giggles and I ask, scared? And then she says, “It was almost like this whole different world, like this secret no one knew about. I was like... what is this?” And so it began: what I imagine will be a life-long friendship between herself and the practice.

Outside of the studio, Laurel spends a good amount of time running, hiking, and this time of year, snowboarding. She played collegiate soccer as a midfielder (enter, love of running) and regularly runs in the trail races in Flagstaff. Being active outside among her native Flagstaff pines holds dear importance in her life. And yet, yoga has come to hold a uniquely special place in her life.

“Running is so great because I’m able to combine these two totally different worlds, she says, “pushing myself physically with also finding the place where I can be by myself and have that spiritual side: that’s when I pray and think. (But) there’s always something... missing with every other sport. Yoga combines more aspects of my life than anything else does.”

So, what does it combine? She says she walked out of that first class feeling like she’d never felt. Of course, part of that was she was sore in places she’d never been sore (it was one of Alvaro’s Monday classes) but also, there was something else.

“I felt changed after just an hour. I felt different after every class,” she says. “I would walk out of class, and things would look different. Especially (after) Alvaro’s classes. He makes you think about so many different things. It’s like something shifts inside you a little.”

I ask what would shift; what the difference was. She hesitates a moment, trying to wrap words around it. She says at first, she didn’t quite know what it was. Two years later, she says,

“Now I’ve figure out what that different world was (that) I saw. It’s this place where you go and so many different things are connected. You’re heart gets changed and your body gets changed, and I can go there and figure out things about myself while also doing it with everyone else.”

She says that having such an introspective experience along with a room full of people creates a distinctive connection among the people in the

room. She says, “You feel connected to people, but you also feel so connected to what your own heart is doing.”

When we talk about this idea of the internal and external aspects of yoga classes, I realize that it almost sounds counterintuitive: that the company of people around you could lead you further inside yourself, somehow. Laurel speaks about this dynamic in terms of giving. “I think the more you figure out (about your heart), the more you can give it out, like you’re collecting pieces in order to give them... The more you know anything, the more you (can) share it.” She pauses a second, and then says, “It’s like you step into that room, and it’s a little safer to try to do it there.”

Finally, I ask her how the practice has changed her, since she started two years ago. She smiles, and describes to me the corner where she laid a borrowed mat for the first time. . “It’s almost hard not to change a little every time,” she says. “It’s subtle... but then I look from when I started, and I see fairly big changes from the start.” She pauses and then says, “It gives me confidence in believing I have something to give.”